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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/30/2017  
TAGS: PGOV KPKO MOPS PREF CG  
SUBJECT: CONGOLESE "MIXED BRIGADES" CONDUCT OFFENSIVES  
AGAINST FDLR IN NORTH KIVU

Classified By: PolOff CBrown, reasons 1.4 b/d.

¶1. (C) Summary: Three "mixed" brigades of the Congolese military (FARDC) in North Kivu province have launched limited offensives against suspected FDLR forces. Initial reports indicate the FARDC has had moderate success in the operations, re-establishing control of several main roads in the Rutshuru area. FARDC commanders claim they have killed nearly 30 presumed FDLR members. Despite some media reports, there do not appear to be any massive civilian population displacements caused by the latest fighting. End summary.

¶2. (C) The FARDC began military operations against the FDLR in North Kivu April 25 with the aim of retaking control of several main roads and eliminating FDLR activities in the area. According to FARDC 8th Military Region (North Kivu) Deputy Commander Col. Delphin Kahimbi, two battalions each from the "mixed" Alpha, Bravo and Delta brigades conducted the operations. (Note: The so-called "mixed" brigades are units combining soldiers formerly loyal to renegade General Laurent Nkunda and those loyal to the GDRC. They were created as part of a cease-fire between Nkunda and the GDRC in December 2006. End note.) According to MONUC military spokesman Major Gabriel de Brosses, MONUC peacekeepers have not participated in any of the operations, nor have they provided logistical assistance to the FARDC. De Brosses added that MONUC was not consulted nor given much advance notice before the offensive began.

¶3. (C) Most of the fighting took place April 25-26 north and east of Rutshuru, some 40 miles northeast of the provincial capital Goma. Alpha Brigade focused its activities in the area around Kanyabayonga; Bravo near the border village of Nyamilima; and Delta around the town of Kikuku. Kahimbi told us April 30 small-scale operations are ongoing throughout Rutshuru territory. He claimed the FARDC has killed 29 suspected FDLR members and captured ten weapons. No FARDC casualties have yet been reported, according to Kahimbi.

¶4. (C) Contacts in North Kivu reported to us that the initial FARDC operations have been a relative success. North Kivu's Immigration Director Didier Iwondo said the FARDC has "conducted itself well" during the offensive and continues to press its advantage in pursuing the FDLR. Former North Kivu Governor Eugene Serufuli told us the FARDC has recaptured many positions in Rutshuru previously held by the FDLR. He added that no major fighting has taken place since April 27, as many of the suspected FDLR fighters have fled into Virunga National Park.

¶5. (C) De Brosses told us MONUC will continue to monitor the situation and has several military observers and mobile

operating bases positioned throughout the province. He said to date there have been no reports of any FARDC atrocities or exactions against the local population following the initial fighting.

¶6. (C) Some media reports have claimed tens of thousands civilians may have been forced to flee the latest fighting. De Brosses said he seriously doubted these figures, as MONUC observers have not seen any major population movements in the affected areas. He added that most of those who may have fled were probably family members of FDLR fighters. De Brosses said the FARDC has captured several FDLR camps in Rutshuru territory, destroying at least eight of them, which is the most likely source of any displaced persons. Serufuli and Iwondo also said they have no reports of significant IDPs created by the recent violence.

¶7. (C) Comment: The reported offensive is the long-announced next phase in the so-called "mixage" process in which Nkunda and FARDC troops were to attempt to eliminate the FDLR. It is unlikely they will be able to sustain prolonged operations to achieve this goal, especially without logistical or operational support from MONUC. The apparent lack of major IDP displacements in the area may indicate as well less actual fighting than the FARDC may be claiming. End comment.

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